women news

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In introducing the item on the advancement of women, the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations Office at Vienna, asked the Third Committee of the General Assembly a question: "Whether, in this last decade of the twentieth century, the United Nations will finish at least one task it set for itself at its founding. Shall we achieve equality in law and in fact between women and men by the year 2000?"

She continued by saying:

"The conversion of right in law into right in practice is a logical sequence but with a considerable time lag. The equality theme of the Commission on the Status of Women next year, on which preliminary information is before you, is the elimination of *de jure* and de facto discrimination against women. It addresses the question of what measures are needed to eliminate the effects of past discrimination which impede the exercise of equal rights today and will continue in the future. It is especially concerned with temporary measures, including affirmative action, that are intended to place all women today on the same footing as men by compensating for past discrimination. This implies that the world cannot wait to achieve equality when the young people of today, for whom equal access is more likely than for their mothers or grandmothers, become the adults of tomorrow. Public policy must make provision for today's adult women fully to exercise their legal rights.

"The development theme also implies a shift in emphasis. It can no longer be accepted that when higher levels of development are attained there will be advancement of women. Without advancement of women there will be no development. Women must not be seen as outcomes or victims of development processes, but rather as principal actors in the process itself. As the analysis of the role of ageing women shows, neither can we write off the contribution of any woman alive today, nor can we wait until the future to make the policies to provide for women of tomorrow, young or old. And this is as true of traditional aspects of development, such as investment, trade and entrepreneurship, as it is of the conservation of the environment. Whether in those countries traditionally considered developing or those, like in Eastern Europe, where reform processes provide both perils and opportunities for women — as shown in a United Nations seminar on the subject in April — it is necessary to see gender in a new light.

"The priority theme in peace is particularly poignant this year when hopes have risen that democratic forms of governance will press the world closer to the objectives of peace set up in the Charter. But here too there must be a recognition that it is not that democracy will lead to the advancement of women. Without advancement of women there will be no democracy.

"... The programme of the United Nations on advancement of women, since 1946, has survived because Governments, women's organizations and the secretariats of the United Nations system have persevered. They have not lost faith in the ability to achieve the objective.

"... The 1995 World Conference on Women should provide a focus of efforts over the next four years. It is designed to be a conference that talks about tactics, that talks about practical steps to eliminate major obstacles. It is intended to call attention again to the issue, to provide a focus to the national and regional levels. It is intended to provide the last big push to completing the job started in 1946."

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

Asia and the Pacific

In 1992, a new multi-disciplinary subprogramme of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on women in development will focus on the regional implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, with specific reference to the effective mobilization and integration of women into development. Specifically, ESCAP will prepare a study on the implementation of the Forward-looking Strategies in the region and hold an expert group meeting to prepare for an intergovernmental regional meeting in 1993 to review the implementation of the Forward-looking Strategies. The main thrust will be: (a) strengthening the Women's Information Network for Asia and the Pacific (WINAP) through advisory services and training to assist national women's information centres in collecting, analysing, processing and disseminating information; (b) developing gender-disaggregated data and indicators as a basis for the formulation and application of effective national policies for the integration of women into development; (c) analysing women's participation in the economy, with special reference to the role of women in the informal sector and the means whereby their productivity in that sector may be enhanced; and (d) monitoring the implementation of international conventions, strategies and instruments for the advancement of women in development.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The Fifth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean was held at Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles, from 16 to 19 September 1991.

In his address to the Conference, the Deputy Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women suggested three concepts for discussion, as set out below.

"Firstly, the legal rights of women should be used as a tool for furthering the elimination of de facto discrimination. The legal foundation has already been laid in the countries of the region. For example, all the countries in the hemisphere, except three, are parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. To be able to exercise these rights, however, women need to learn more about them and about the legal system, a process that could be called 'legal literacy'.

"Secondly, with regard to development, findings concerning difficult economic circumstances and their relation to the situation of women have been thoroughly examined at the international level. But this review leads beyond the image of women as victims of national and international policies, and shows that the full participation of women in development may constitute a factor in the revitalization of the development process itself. Women's abilities in business and as market participants, which have been demonstrated but not properly recognized, are just one more proof that women should be the 'subject' and not the 'object' of development. The eagerness of women to contribute their efforts to national development is a recently discovered tool in the effort to bring about economic and social well-being.

"The third and perhaps most decisive point is the political participation of women at the national and international levels. Formerly concerned about political participation as a right, we have come to recognize that the absence of women in decision-making is in contradiction to democracy. If women do not share power, democracy does not exist. This is a situation that could change very quickly, since each election has the potential to be a revolution. For that to happen, women will have to exercise their right to vote in order to make their interests a part of the political process in their countries.

"Each of these three points implies that women must become aware of their position in present and future society, and re-evaluate their participation as a duty rather than a right. Moreover, every woman must understand that she has a responsibility to be economically and politically active on an equal footing with men."

The Conference adopted a resolution requesting the convening in 1992 of an expert group meeting to initiate the preparation of a new regional plan of action for the integration of women into the economic and social develop-

ment of Latin America and the Caribbean. The plan would then be submitted to the Sixth Regional Conference, to be held in 1994, for consideration by Governments as a regional instrument in preparation for the forthcoming world conference on women in 1995. It was recommended that the experts should, *inter alia*: (a) consider the adoption of concrete measures for action at the national, regional and international levels in regard to the struggle against poverty, the problem of violence against women in the family and society, and the role of women in the protection of the environment; (b) take into account the political education of women, including their political participation in electoral processes; (c) seek to prevent social and economic regression in the status of women and, to that end, adopt a gender focus that takes account of the strategic and practical needs of women in recognition of the severe social and economic impact of structural adjustment measures on the situation of women; and (d) consider the complex combination of social, economic and cultural contributions of women in everyday life and the mutual effects of these separate contributions.

The Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean was requested to ensure that the work of its Women and Development Unit included the topics of: human resources; research on the changing role of women in today's society; technical assistance for the incorporation of women into changing production patterns; and national and regional cooperation on programmes and projects, especially in the area of employment.

STATUS OF THE CONVENTION

The date 3 September 1991 marked the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. On that date, there were 109 States parties to the Convention. The Convention was adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979. According to its article 27, the Convention entered into force on the thirtieth day after the date of the deposit of the twentieth instrument of ratification or accession, namely on 3 September 1981.

Since the last update on the status of ratifications (*Women News* No. 2, 1991), the Central African Republic, Israel, Nepal and the Netherlands have ratified, and Zimbabwe has acceded to, the Convention.

Of the 166 States members of the United Nations and the four permanent observers, 60 States have yet to ratify the Convention. However, in Europe only four States, and in the Americas only three States, are not yet parties to the Convention.

AFRICA PRIZE FOR LEADERSHIP

Two women have been awarded the Africa Prize for Leadership for the Sustainable End of Hunger by the Hunger Project. Maryam Babangida of Nigeria is the founder of the Better Life Programme, which informs women of their rights, encourages them to form cooperatives and small enterprises, and motivates them to vote in elections and to participate fully in national political life. Wangaari Maathai of Kenya, the first woman to become a doctor of philosophy and professor at the University of Nairobi, is the founder of the Green Belt Movement. This environmental protection movement has planted over 2 million trees and established nurseries throughout Kenya, providing additional income to rural women. In 1990, the co-prize winner, Esther Ocloo, was the first woman ever to have received the Prize (see *Women News* No. 39, October 1990).

PUBLICATIONS

The following publications, issued by the Division for the Advancement of Women, are available from the Sales Section of the United Nations in New York or Geneva:

Women in Decision-making: Case Study on Costa Rica; (Sales No. E.91.IV.5)

Women in Decision-making: Case Study on Greece; (Sales No. E.91.IV.6)

Women, Households and Change (jointly produced with the United Nations University); (Sales No. E.91.III.A.3)

Forthcoming

Women in Politics and Decision-making in the Late Twentieth Century

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WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

With increased attention being paid to the advancement of women and their full integration into development by the entities of the United Nations system and with the growing realization of the importance of women's equal participation in decision-making, it is clear that the linkage must be made between women and the recent international priority: the environment. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) recognizes that women are the first to suffer from environmental deterioration and lack of development. For this reason, women appear to be more concerned than men about the state of the Earth and the fate of future generations. Women can play special and important roles not only in environmental protection, but also in conservation and the effective management of different resources.

Women and children first

A symposium on the impact of environmental degradation and poverty on women and children, entitled "Women and Children First", was held at Geneva from 27 to 31 May 1991. It had been organized by the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which is to be held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Co-sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and the Government of Denmark, the symposium was attended by 85 representatives of government offices, non-governmental organizations, United Nations bodies, including the Division for the Advancement of Women, international aid agencies and researchers.

The participants adopted a statement in which they requested that gender issues be addressed at the Conference as a distinct topic, in addition to being integrated horizontally into all discussions, and that the recommendations of the symposium, as well as those emanating from the Global Assembly on Women and the Environment: Partners in Life (see article below) and the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, should be submitted to the Preparatory Committee for the Conference.

Preparatory Committee for United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

Meeting at Geneva in September 1991, the Preparatory Committee for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development sought to ensure, at its third session, that the viewpoint of women would be included in the analysis of issues on its agenda and their interests reflected in proposals for action in Agenda 21. It requested the Secretary-General of the Conference to ensure that women's contribution to sustainable development would be considered and included, both as a distinct issue and in all substantive work of the Committee, particularly in the Earth charter, Agenda 21 and the conventions. It also requested that women be recognized as active and equal participants in the management of the ecosystem and the control of its degradation. It further called for the inclusion in Agenda 21 of a global goal aiming at achieving the full participation of women in decision-making for sustainable development at all levels.

Global Assembly on Women and the Environment

The Global Assembly on Women and the Environment: Partners in Life was held at Miami, Florida, from 4 to 8 November 1991. It was convened under the sponsorship of the Senior Women's Advisory Group on Sustainable Development of UNEP and implemented by WorldWIDE Network.

The four subject areas were water, waste, energy (as it relates to climate change) and environmentally friendly systems, technologies and products. Over 325 success stories from the five geographical regions (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America) were presented at the Assembly. The Division for the Advancement of Women participated and contributed in the area of women and leadership.

The Assembly was followed by the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, held on 8-12 November 1991, which had been organized by the International Policy Action Committee on Environment and Development.

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